



Jon S. Corzine
Governor

PREPAREDNESS TODAY



Fred M. Jacobs, M.D., J.D.
Commissioner

W elcome

“**Preparedness Today**” is the Department of Health and Senior Services’ (DHSS) newsletter that will provide both our staff and our partners valuable information on the latest DHSS preparedness and response initiatives and projects.

“Preparedness Today” will be published quarterly and will be distributed through email as well as posted on our website.

The importance of communications has been well-documented in numerous studies, reports and media articles in regard to preparedness and response during public health emergencies.

We all saw how important communications was during our involvement in TOPOFF 3 last April. We saw how it was sorely needed in our nation’s response to Hurricane Katrina in August.

This newsletter is another vehicle for communication within DHSS as well as with our partners statewide. It is a joint project between the Division of Health Infrastructure Preparedness and Emergency Response (HIPER) and the Office of Communications.

In this inaugural edition, you will find articles on New Jersey’s growing Medical Reserve Corps, regional grants awarded to health care facilities to conduct pandemic influenza exercises and the Department’s experience during the Hurricane Katrina response.

We hope you find the information in this issue and subsequent issues useful and valuable.

David W. Gruber, Senior Assistant Commissioner, HIPER

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in Spanish

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New Jersey to Receive \$2.6 million to Accelerate Pandemic Influenza Efforts

New Jersey will receive \$2.6 million in federal funding to bolster its state and local pandemic influenza planning. The award is part of \$100 million in funding being distributed nationwide by the federal Department of Health and Human Services.

The New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services is determining how best to allocate funding throughout the state, including local health agencies and facilities, to increase the state’s pandemic influenza preparedness.

The federal funding is the first phase of monies being granted to state health departments. An additional \$250 million will be distributed in phase two.

“We are currently assessing New Jersey’s current state of pandemic influenza preparedness to determine how the funding can best be spent,” said David. W. Gruber, Senior Assistant Commissioner, Health Infrastructure Preparedness and Emergency Response. “Funding could be used to increase our technology, enhance surveillance

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Pandemic Flu Efforts

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and testing on a local and state level or to help families prepare for a pandemic. Also, a portion of the funding will be distributed directly to county and local agencies to bolster preparedness on all levels.”

The Department of Health and Senior Services began its pandemic influenza planning about six years ago when it drafted its first state-wide pandemic plan. This plan has been shared with the Department’s stakeholders and partners. It has been revised several times and is undergoing its latest draft which will be posted on the DHSS website (www.nj.gov/health) when it is completed.

DHSS is also funding five regional influenza pandemic exercises that will be held this spring and summer. The exercises will test the surge capacity of health care facilities during a regional response to a pandemic.

DHSS Releases Spanish Language Edition of Citizen’s Guide to Public Health Emergency Planning

The New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS) has released a Spanish language edition of *Ready Together New Jersey (Todos Listos Nueva Jersey)*, a guide to help residents prepare for public health emergencies.

“Events such as Hurricane Katrina and September 11, 2001 remind us that every family should prepare at home for any and all types of health emergencies,” said DHSS Commissioner Fred M. Jacobs, M.D., J.D. “*Ready Together New Jersey* is a small booklet offering valuable information and resources for New Jerseyans. Every individual and family in New Jersey should have a copy.”

Ready Together New Jersey provides information on assembling an emergency kit and creating a personalized action plan. The guide includes telephone numbers and web addresses for agencies that provide information during an emergency. With *Ready Together New Jersey*, residents can record key personal information on a tear-out wallet card that can be kept with them at all times.

DHSS distributed nearly two million copies of the English version in April 2005. Individuals or organizations interested in receiving a copy of *Ready Together New Jersey* or *Todos Listos Nueva Jersey* can call their local health department. To download a copy, or to get more information on New Jersey’s preparedness efforts, visit the DHSS website at www.nj.gov/health.



Courses/Seminars

Click on the link below to review current program offerings on the NJ Learning Management Network (NJLMN). You can create a personal account which will enable you to register for courses/seminars on-line, review your transcript, and track contact hours for license compliance.

http://njlmn.rutgers.edu/jsp/cat2/cat_date.jsp

More on the Web

www.nj.gov/health

www.njmrc.nj.gov/hcpr

www.cdc.gov

New Jersey's Medical Reserve Corps Growing Stronger

by Sally Flanagan and Tom Slater

Recognizing the role of volunteers in assisting during a public health emergency, the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services (NJDHSS), in partnership with state county and local health departments, has launched the Medical Reserve Corps to actively involves citizens in helping our communities and state respond to a terrorism event or natural disaster.

The New Jersey Medical Reserve Corps (NJMRC) is a resource of volunteer physicians, nurses, pharmacists and others with a broad range of skills in medicine, public health and other support fields such as data entry, security and hospital-ity services who could respond to any public health emergency.

As of January 2006, there are 23 MRC units in New Jersey that are registered and recognized by the National MRC Program Office with three other programs awaiting national approval. More than 900 individuals have registered in the It is the goal to have an MRC unit in every county of New Jersey.

Several hundred volunteers attended the first-ever Region II Volunteer Training Conference in Manalapan in October 2005. Commissioner Jacobs was one of the keynote speakers who discussed the importance they play in providing emergency assistance across New Jersey and other Region II states.

Health care professionals and community volunteers can register for the NJMRC. Any licensed or certified health care professional, practicing or retired, who lives or works in New Jersey, can apply for membership in an MRC. Other residents who have an interest can also apply to the program.

Interested individuals can register online at www.njmrc.nj.gov. Select the county or municipality you would like to join. People without computer access should contact their county or local health department for an application.

New Jersey's Response To Hurricane Katrina

by Jim Bruncati

As Hurricane Katrina was bearing down on the Gulf Coast of the United States in late August, the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS) was ramping up for a long-distance response – our state's initiative called the Louisiana Emergency Assistance Deployment (LEAD).

Bringing a diverse group of individuals from medical, emergency management, fire and law enforcement agencies to a remote area of operation can be a challenge even under optimal conditions. Bringing this group over 1300 miles to an area that lacked basic services such as electricity, food and water was a daunting task.

The overall management of the New Jersey response was the responsibility of the New Jersey State Police. The Medical Unit was a support element charged with providing medical and public health expertise for a tent city of up to 400 people.

The 58 vehicle caravan arrived at "Camp New Jersey" in Kenner, Louisiana 37 hours after leaving New Jersey. We were greeted by oppressive heat and humidity, dirty water and on-site generated electricity. The area around the "Camp" appeared to be deserted and all stores and businesses were closed. The Medical Unit quickly went to work setting up a two tent field hospital, assessing the environment for public health hazards and creating a schedule for hospital coverage by medical staff. Camp New Jersey was up and running within six hours of our arrival.

After several days of operation we learned that the Medical Unit was being recalled to New Jersey and that the State of Louisiana would provide medical support for Camp New Jersey. Unit members, although disappointed that we were unable to complete our mission, learned valuable lessons that will aide in future deployments.

Crisis Communications Plans Need to be Updated

In preparing for a public health emergency, having a comprehensive crisis communications plan is a key component to preparedness. However, once a plan is developed, it shouldn't be put aside until an emergency occurs.

Like all plans of operations, crisis communications plans need to be reviewed, updated and refined. Contact lists need to be updated and procedures need to be refined.

The New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services' Office of Communications reviews its crisis communications plan on a quarterly basis. Contact lists are updated on an as needed basis. Public health

messages are reviewed. Protocols are re-examined.

It is also important to teach and test the crisis communications plan to your agency at least once a year, more often if possible.

The following are suggestions for reviewing communications plans:

- ① Review approval process for the release of information.
- ② Develop list of designated spokespersons, including subject matter experts.
- ③ Identify agencies (local, county and state) you would work with to

develop public information messages.

- ④ Update contact information for staff and partner agencies.
- ⑤ Identify and assign back-up staff for key staff.
- ⑥ Test equipment, i.e., computers, phones, laptops, fax machines.
- ⑦ Update local and regional media contact lists, including TV, radio and print media to include fax numbers and email addresses.
- ⑧ Identify staff who can post information to your website during regular and non-work hours.
- ⑨ Update your "go kits."

Hospitals to Test Pandemic Influenza Readiness In Regional Exercises

by Terry Clancy

Given the inevitability of an influenza pandemic, infectious disease outbreak, or other

public health emergencies, health care facilities and agencies must prepare for an overwhelming number of patients for either an acute period or over an extended period of time.

To this extent, DHSS has awarded grants of \$50,000 to five hospitals in each of New Jersey's five healthcare regions to conduct an exercise series to test their ability to receive, treat and transfer patients as appropriate in an influenza pandemic.

Healthcare facilities that were awarded grants are Jersey City Medical Center (North East); Warren Hospital (North West); Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital, New Brunswick (Central East); Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital, Hamilton (Central West); and AtlantiCare, formerly Atlantic City Medical Center (South).

The exercise series that will be conducted in each of the above regions will directly support acute care facilities and other healthcare partners and entities, such as those in long term care, federally quali-

fied health centers, home health, emergency medical services, laboratories, and public health agencies to exercise their respective plans, policies and procedures.

The exercise series in each of the regions will culminate with a full scale exercise to take place at a time determined by the Exercise Design and Planning Group for each region. It is anticipated that each exercise series will be completed by August 31, 2006.

If you have any questions or would like additional information on these exercises, please contact Bob Brownlee at 609-292-2525.

State's Public Health Laboratories Provide Important Protection Against Terrorism

by Susan Mikorski

As one might expect, New Jersey's Division of Public Health and Environmental Laboratories (PHEL) plays an important role in emergency preparedness and response.

Public Health Laboratory Services (PHLS), the infectious disease testing arm of PHEL, tests for a number of infectious diseases and emerging pathogens at their Trenton location. To enhance laboratory safety and security, a new Biosafety Level 3 (BSL3) Modular laboratory has recently been constructed and certified. Staff is prepared to perform rapid testing from environmental and clinical samples potentially containing bioterrorism agents at this site.

The PHLS follows Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) approved testing protocols, while developing and validating tests for new and emerging diseases. Testing for Norwalk virus, West Nile

virus, SARS and avian influenza as well as newborn screening, drug testing and food safety analysis are just a few of the other enhanced and ongoing PHEL activities.

The Department's public health laboratory is also part of a network of laboratories known as the Laboratory Response Network (LRN) which functions in an integrated, coordinated fashion. The PHEL role within the LRN is to provide critical coordination between ourselves, *THE* confirmatory laboratory in New Jersey, New Jersey's sentinel (clinical) laboratory community, and our federal partners. We are accomplishing this by identifying all LRN sentinel laboratories within our state, providing preparedness and response training to ensure technical competencies, enhancing communication through various mechanisms, including an LRN webpage and by exercising the LRN.

Over the past two years PHEL has been very involved in upgrading existing administrative and laboratory spaces. Environmental Chemistry Laboratory Services has moved to a new site and in addition to routine chemical analysis on samples submitted for testing, has also been CDC trained to perform testing on suspected agents of chemical terrorism.

Existing Division laboratory and administrative buildings in Trenton have recently undergone a serious facelift, brightening spirits as well as walls and floors. Additionally, PHEL administrators are working on plans for an entire new laboratory facility while maintaining continuity of services at their existing sites. This new facility would replace the old building in Trenton and provide the capacity for upgrading to state-of-the-art standards.

DHSS Unveils New Communicable Disease Reporting and Surveillance System

The Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS) has announced a new reporting site for reporting communicable diseases - the Communicable Disease Reporting and Surveillance System (CDRSS). This site will replace the old CDRS production site.

Five hundred users were trained during November and December 2005 in its enhanced reporting and

surveillance capabilities. In contrast to CDRS, CDRSS is a patient-centric system which allows users to track all information on a patient, including any past cases of illnesses or other relevant demographic information.

In the CDRSS training site, users can practice enhanced reporting and investigation capabilities including tracking signs and

symptoms, risk factors, etc., while also trying out new features such as the documentation of multiple addresses and aliases per patient, contact tracing and multiple reports via maps.

Cases with addresses that could not previously been geo-coded can now be physically mapped to specific coordinates so they appear within

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the correct local health department jurisdictions where they can be appropriately investigated.

A detailed user guide posted right on the web-enabled site walks users step-by-step through the data entry function with simulation data provided throughout for the user to practice in the training site. Ongoing guide updates will provide more support at the users' fingertips.

All users must be trained on the CDRSS training site before they will be given access to the new CDRSS production site to report communicable diseases. Increased security in the CDRSS also requires that users sign a confidentiality agreement before accessing the new system.

Any users not currently trained on the new CDRSS can register for a

training session at 3636 Quakerbridge Rd., Mercerville, by contacting CDRSS@doh.state.nj.us. Upon completion of the training, access to the CDRSS production site will be granted so that electronic reporting can begin immediately.